ALBERTA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD

open minds

SUMMER 2007 | NEWSLETTER

How to instill resiliency in children

World renowned early childhood development expert Dr. Bruce Perry addresses parents and caregivers

There's an old African proverb that states, "It takes a village to raise a child." This is particularly true in today's society, where children are subjected to the daily uncertainties of life, said Dr. Bruce Perry in a special talk at the University of Calgary on May 8.

Dr. Perry, a world renowned children's mental health expert, spoke to a crowd of 100 parents, caregivers and health care professionals during Mental Health Week, which occurred May 7 to 13. The Alberta Mental Health Board's (AMHB) focus for this year was building resiliency in pre-school aged children. To promote resiliency, the AMHB created an interactive tool called *The Bounce Back Book: Building Resiliency Skills in Your Preschooler* to give suggestions on ways parents and caregivers can teach kids how to 'bounce back' when things in life don't go as planned.

Dr. Perry, who has previously consulted on such high profile cases as the terrorist attacks of September 11, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the Columbine school shootings, says parents and caregivers are vital to the development of children. The way our lives are structured in today's busy world makes it difficult to develop the parent-child relationship, so parents and caregivers need to put in extra effort.

shown that kids are "touch-starved," yet physical contact is often forbidden in young children in a classroom setting.

Society needs to rethink its approach to children, he said. In hunter-gatherer societies, the adult to child ratio used to be 4:1. In today's society, the ratio is more like one adult to every four children.

The parent-child relationship starts in utero. Expectant mothers can transfer feelings, both positive and stressful, onto their unborn child. Dr. Perry says it's good to have stability during pregnancy, to lead a low-stress lifestyle and avoid making major life changes.

Adults need to model positive interactions so that children can learn concepts such as empathy and self-regulation, important components of resiliency. If a child is never exposed to the English language, we would never expect him or her to speak it. In the same vein, if children never witnesses healthy, positive behaviour, how can we expect them to live it out day-to-day? Dr. Perry asked.

Research has shown that the average child's brain is physically larger than a neglected child's, because human interactions encourage brain development and function. Many people don't realize that so much brain development occurs in early childhood. "A baby's brain is big. A four-year-

Dr. Bruce Perry addresses caregivers and health care professionals during Mental Health Week

need the freedom to explore their world and have the knowledge that they can return to a safe home base (their parent or caregiver) when they want to.

The feeling of being safe and cared for is vital to a child's well-being. Parents can foster this sense by ensuring that they themselves feel secure in their own life. "In order for a parent to make a child resilient, they must feel safe themselves."

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In some cases, the advent of technology is taking precious social interaction away from kids. TVs have become babysitters in some households. "TV cuts seven hours a day from healthy family interaction," Dr. Perry said, noting that it's even higher in high-risk families.

Children crave appropriate physical affection from the adults in their lives. Research has

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Parents and caregivers need to give children the opportunity to experience life's ups and downs. Children need to have the opportunity to experience a healthy amount of stress in order to learn how to deal with it in a healthy way. Kids

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The Bounce Back Book is a great place to start building resiliency in children. "This little book you got has great ideas," Dr. Perry told the crowd. The interactive tool is available across the province from Parent Link centres and online at **www.amhb.ab.ca**.

Building resiliency in toddlers the focus of Mental Health Week 2007

In today's rapidly changing world, children are subjected to many factors that influence their mental health. It may sound unbelievable, but children as young as two to four years of age can experience problems with anxiety.

Mental health problems are more common in children than most people think. One in seven Canadian children will experience a mental health problem before the age of 18. In 2005/2006, more than 23,000 children in Alberta under the age of 10 visited a physician because of mental health concerns. The majority, 72 per cent, were treated for developmental issues such as conduct disorders, learning disorders and attention-deficit disorders. Sixteen per cent of the cases related to anxiety disorders, and 11 per cent were diagnosed with other conditions that required clinical attention.

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MINDING THE WORKPLACE

AMHB focuses on mental health in the workplace

More than ever, employers are feeling the economic and social impact of mental health in the workplace. Depression and anxiety costs the economy $14.4 billion in lost productivity every year according to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto. Workplace experts are also noticing a disturbing trend towards "presenteeism," where employees come to work everyday but are unproductive.

Savvy companies are starting to recognize that there is no health without mental health. Taking initiative to address the mental health needs of workers is not only vital to developing a healthy workforce, it also pays off in increased productivity and decreased turnover.

Mental health in the workplace was the focus of the Alberta Mental Health Board's (AMHB) *Minding the Workplace* supplement, which ran in the May 2007 issue of *Alberta Venture* magazine. For more information on workplace mental health, visit the AMHB website at **www.amhb.ab.ca**.

The following articles supplement *Minding the Workplace* and demonstrate that Alberta employers can make a difference.

The Research Agenda

Good mental health underpins our individual and societal capacity for adaptation to change, productivity, innovation and sustaining a competitive advantage. For most Albertans, the majority of their adult lives are spent at work, and work environments can be stressful. It should be no surprise that workplace mental health is an important area for research.

Workplace mental health is one of the priority research areas for the Alberta Mental Health Research Partnership Program. The Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB) has successfully brought together various stakeholders from across the province (researchers, service providers, funders, policy makers, advocacy groups, and industry representation) to form this comprehensive, integrated research program. Other priorities on its research agenda include: mental illness and addictions; effectiveness of the mental health system and services; and child and adolescent mental health.

A key component of the Mental Health Research

The program is built on the strong belief that not only is there a need to conduct research - it also needs to be put to work by translating it into practice and using the outcomes to improve the lives of Albertans. Work to date has identified key areas where research can help improve mental health in the workplace, such as:

- Measuring the economic impact of mental illnesses
- Creating positive workplaces that promote and support the mental health of employees
- Reducing the impact of mental illnesses through improved awareness, interventions and support for employee wellness
- Reducing stigma and discrimination
- Addressing specific issues in the workplace including addictions, workplace stress, the impact of technology, and the stresses related to particular sectors such as farming or the oil patch

Significant progress in these areas is only

Desk bullies

The playground is not the only place where you'll find one person holding their power over another. There are also workplace bullies, more than 80 per cent of whom are likely to be supervisors. These are expensive employees; they create a tremendous liability for the employer by causing stress-related health and safety problems and driving good employees out of the organization. They are equally likely to be a man or a woman. A 2003 survey of self-described bullying victims by the Workplace Bullying & Trauma Institute found that victims suffered stress effects such as severe anxiety, disrupted sleep and post-traumatic stress disorder. In 70 per cent of cases, the bullying only stopped when the victim quit or was let go. Only in 13 per cent of cases were workplace bullies reprimanded or penalized. In the

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A key component of the Mental Health Research Partnership Program is the recruitment and support of Mental Health Research Chairs. Leading international experts are currently being recruited into Alberta's universities to work with health regions to conduct and guide research, collaboration and knowledge exchange in the priority areas.

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Significant progress in these areas is only possible through a strong partnership commitment and engagement of business leaders. For more information about how to become involved, please contact Bailey Wilson at (780) 969-0513.

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GRIP magazine and youth brochure series win awards

The Health Care Public Relations Association (HCPRA) recently announced the winners of its 2007 Hygeia Awards, which recognize excellence in health care communications and outstanding accomplishments across Canada.

The Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB) received two Hygeia awards at this year's HCPRA conference. *GRIP* magazine took first place in the category of external communications. The AMHB's youth mental health brochure series took second place in the category of Special Purpose Communication - General.

"We appreciate the recognition that the award brings to these valuable resources. It is to the credit of the many youth and their coaches who develop the content that has led to its success," said Ruby Brown, vice-president of Advocacy, Innovation and Monitoring at the AMHB. "With so many youth struggling to cope with today's pressures and choices, both *GRIP* magazine and the youth brochures have been embraced by Alberta's youth."

GRIP is a magazine written by Alberta teens, for Alberta teens. The content is directed by a youth advisory council, which determines the theme and direction of the magazine. Stories are submitted from around the province on a variety of topics, from the dangers of crystal meth to cyber safety. Venture Publishing, a partner in *GRIP*, publishes the magazine. View it online at **www.griponlife.ca**.

The AMHB's youth brochures teach youth how to deal with anxiety, stress, exam stress and depression. The brochures explain that it is normal to experience these feelings and it's important to address them in an appropriate way. The brochures are designed to give practical tips so that teens can recognize the signs of these mental health problems and seek help or get help for a friend before the problem worsens.

Inuit relations strengthened

Canada's northern Aboriginal Peoples, the Inuit, take pride in a long history of survival, endurance and peacefulness. Living in this part of the world means living in a land of great beauty and extremes, and being deeply connected to nature. But today, like many other Aboriginal peoples around the world, Canada's Inuit are facing many challenges affecting their culture and mental wellness.

With this in mind, the Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB) and other partners from across Canada, including Alberta Health and Wellness; Alberta International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations; Capital Health; the Government of Nunavut; Health Canada; the Kitikmeot Inuit Association and the University of Alberta held the *Healing Through Sharing* meeting in Cambridge Bay Nunavut on May 28 and 29, 2007. The purpose of the meeting was to build and strengthen relationships between organizations working to promote Aboriginal mental wellness and to share best practices in Aboriginal mental health.

Jason Tologanak, Policy Analyst of the Kitikmeot Inuit Association said, "There is such tremendous strength in our northern communities, but no one can tackle issues like suicide alone. We all need to work as partners to find solutions."

The meeting also included the AMHB's Wisdom Committee. The committee is made up of Elders and other key individuals from First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. The Wisdom Committee provided advice and guidance to ensure the unique cultural and spiritual needs of Aboriginal peoples were reflected at the meeting.

Aboriginal spirituality was an important part of the meeting and ceremonies and celebrations reflected this, including the opening pipe ceremony, the lighting of the quillig (a seal oil lamp), and performances by traditional Inuit drum dancers and throat singers.

The meeting looked at what we can all do to better address the challenges facing the Aboriginal peoples of the north, including:

- Loss of/changes in language and culture
- Socioeconomic factors such as high poverty rates, low levels of education, limited employment opportunities, inadequate living conditions
- Historical disruptions of family life as a result of residential school attendance, adoption, long-distance hospitalization
- Violence and high crime rates
- Alcohol and drug addiction
- Canada's highest birth rate
- Extreme isolation (access only by air)

The meeting was unique in many ways, as it combined the moving and deeply personal stories and experiences of Aboriginal Elders with representatives from organizations working in Aboriginal mental health. As Rose Potts, an Elder on the Wisdom Committee said, "We have to do what we can to empower our communities to be strong. This meeting is about us all taking responsibility and building strength by working together."

Attendees listen to a presentation

This meeting was also unique in that many of the organizations from Alberta looked to their partners in the North for ideas as well. "The Inuit people are incredibly resilient and there is much to learn from them, which can be translated into the work we do in Alberta," said Elsie Bastien, Director of Aboriginal Mental Health for the AMHB. "This meeting was about mutual sharing and understanding."

Many people in Canada's Inuit communities are working very hard to maintain a healthy and vibrant society. But we all share responsibility and must contribute energetically to making progress. This meeting was just one example of people working together to build stronger Aboriginal individuals and communities.

Mental Health Capacity Building celebrated

More than 1,200 people show they 'Believe in Youth – Believe in the Future'

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Mental Health Capacity Building celebrated

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What sounded like the usual rambunctious crowd of teens cheering for their favourite team on the football field at T.A. Norris Middle School in Peace River on June 8, was actually in support for classmates Renee Schofield of Peace River High and Robert Diebold of Glenmary High School.

The pair took to centre stage to openly discuss how they have personally benefited from a unique new mental health service designed to support the health and well-being of youth. The students were part of the official launch of the Peace River Mental Health Capacity Building Project with its fitting theme: Believe in Youth – Believe in the Future!

Today, children and youth are more likely to develop a mental illness than 20 years ago. It's estimated that 20 per cent of 12 to 16 year-olds have a mental health problem. In Canada, the average onset age of anxiety disorder is 12, while signs of substance use disorders appear on average at age 18. In 2005/2006, more than 27,337 Alberta youths aged 12 to 18 visited physicians for mental health concerns. Teens need to be able to seek appropriate help when needed. That's what the capacity building project is all about – helping teens make the right connections and get help when they need it.

The Mental Health Capacity Building in Schools project is designed to enhance the overall health and well-being of Peace River youth by providing support and assistance in a number of key areas: stress, anxiety, depression, crisis intervention, making positive choices, health information, referrals to appropriate services, liaisons with families, emotional support, and other areas crucial to a teen's overall mental health and development. Students like Renee and Robert benefit from counselling and support services right at the school site. For example, youth workers are there to not only listen to their problems but help them to find just the right solutions.

The project is an initiative of community partners such as the Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB), Peace River School Division and Holy Family Catholic Regional Division, Peace Country Health, AADAC, Alberta Children's Services, Alberta Education, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – Peace River detachment.

"It is projects like these that help teach and promote resiliency, the ability to bounce back from setbacks and cope with adversity. It teaches our kids how to adapt well to change when things go poorly," said Lynn Damberger, the AMHB's Director of Advocacy and Liaison.

Well-being of children and youth is a high priority in Alberta's mental health system. Mental Health Capacity Building in Schools, led by the AMHB and its key partners, aims to implement this type of school-based mental health capacity projects province-wide with funding through a three-year mental health innovation fund grant. Currently there are five Mental Health Capacity Building Projects implemented in the province. On September 11, 2006, the Province announced $25.7 million over three years to expand the project to as many as 36 communities.

Increasing youth access to these essential services is important for many reasons. Adolescence is a challenging time of change. Youths begin to develop physically, mentally and emotionally, and are influenced by both positive and negative influences in life. Self-harm, depression, stress, bullying and anxiety are just some of the problems that can occur during this period. Adolescence is also often the time when the first signs of mental illness appear.

Information on those projects can be found in the *All for One – Connecting for Kids* newsletter, available online at **www.amhb.ab.ca**.

Peace River students gather on the football field at the Capacity Building Celebration.

Register now!

The date of the Third Annual Mental Health Research Showcase has been changed to November 21-23, 2007 in order to accommodate schedules of key partners and presenters. Participants are encouraged to register early for Showcase 2007 to avoid disappointment. The showcase will take place at the Rimrock Resort and Hotel in Banff.

Building resiliency in toddlers... Continued from cover

Developing resiliency skills can equip children for success. Resilience is defined as the capacities within a person that promote positive outcomes and provide protection from factors that might otherwise place the person at risk for adverse health outcomes. In other words, it is our ability to react positively and adapt well to change when things go poorly. It is such an important concept that the Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB) chose it as the focus of Mental Health Week, which ran May 7 to 13.

Resiliency promotes the maintenance of positive mental health. Research illustrates that resilient people are healthier, live longer, are more successful in school and jobs, are happier in relationships and are less prone to depression.

While it is vital to promote resilience across all age groups, there are several good reasons to target youth and particularly children. From a very early age, individuals are subject to stress, adversity and the development of mental health problems. Age of onset statistics indicate that half of all lifetime cases of DSM IV disorders start by age 14, with anxiety and impulse control disorders appearing earlier. As well, a recent report by the Public Health Agency of Canada called *The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada* (2006) highlights difficulties with emotional well-

$6.9 million dedicated to expand mental health research in Alberta

Alberta will soon be home to world-class mental health researchers thanks to a funding boost from the Government of Alberta.

On June 13, Dave Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness, announced the provincial government would boost mental health research funding to a total of $6.9 million over five years. Alberta Advanced Education and Technology has pledged $3 million in addition to the $3 million commitment of the Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB). The Norlien Foundation and AADAC have each committed $250,000 to the program. Alberta Health and Wellness will provide $400,000 to mental health research.

"This investment will expand our knowledge in how we can best deliver mental health services throughout the province," said Minister Hancock. "Improving mental health services will help more Albertans with mental illness lead productive lives and better manage their health."

The funds will help the Alberta Mental Health Research Partnership Program recruit international mental health experts to Alberta universities and regional health authorities. Researchers will focus on four areas: child and adolescent mental health, mental health in the workplace, mental illness and addictions, and the effectiveness of mental health services and the system. Their findings will be translated into health policy and everyday practices to help create a better mental health system for all Albertans.

The goal is to recruit nine mental health research chairs over the next five years to advance mental health through research and teaching activities. Once in place, the chairs will develop integrated research programs to advance the identified

sharing of knowledge and creating links between researchers and service providers are all expected outcomes of the centre.

The virtual centre will continue to evolve to support the information needs of the mental health community. It will eventually become a portal in which researchers can share their findings with interested policy makers, educators, government departments and front-line professionals.

Dr. Jean Ference, Chair of the AMHB, says the research program will improve the state of mental health in Alberta. "Gaps exist between research findings and actual practice. The research program aims to close these gaps and support knowledge exchange and partnerships between researchers, mental health service providers and policy makers."

More information on the Alberta Mental Health Research Partnership Program can be found on its website, **www.mentalhealthresearch.ca**.

Dave Hancock, Minister of Health

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Children as young as pre-school age can learn skills that create resiliency. Four such skills include self-confidence, emotional regulation, problem solving and empathy. Research also illustrates that not only do children need resiliency skills, but that introducing them at a young age is beneficial. By the age of eight, most children have already developed a style of thinking in response to stress. That is why it is critical for parents to model resiliency skills to their children from an early age.

"Resiliency is vital to the healthy development of children," said Dr. Roger Bland, Executive Medical Director of the AMHB. "Parents and caregivers play a vital role in the development of these skills in children."

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"The research chairs program will improve mental health treatment options for Albertans in those four specific areas by transferring research findings into health promotion, illness prevention and changes in service delivery which can benefit Albertans," said Doug Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. "This funding commitment will help Alberta attract the best experts in the mental health field, helping put Alberta at the forefront of international mental health research."

The funding will also be used to create the emerging Alberta Research and Innovation Centre for Mental Health. This virtual centre will function as a web-based resource, coordinating efforts and communications among a network of stakeholders dedicated to the advancement of mental health. Increased collaboration, between researchers, mental health service providers and policy makers."

More information on the Alberta Mental Health Research Partnership Program can be found on its website, **www.mentalhealthresearch.ca**.

Dave Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness

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If you wish to contact a Board Member, call Lois Facco at the AMHB Board Office:
(780) 917-4111
lois.facco@amhb.ab.ca

AMHB
ALBERTA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD
... Advancing Mental Health

Edmonton Corporate Office
Alberta Mental Health Board
Suite 700, Manulife Place, 10180 – 101 Street
Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 3S4
Phone: 780.422.2233

Calgary Branch Office
Alberta Mental Health Board
Main Floor, Dorchester Square, 1333 – 8 Street SW
Calgary, Alberta, T2R 1M6
Phone: 403.297.3678

If you have story suggestions, questions or comments to assist us with future issues, please contact: Josephine Lamy at josephine.lamy@amhb.ab.ca.